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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001932

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: PGOV NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH CHIEF CLARK TO
DISCUSS THE NIGER DELTA

REF: A. ABUJA 1907

1B. LAGIS 367

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Cheryl Fernandes for reasons
1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 25, Ambassador received Bayelsa traditional leader Chief Edwin K. Clark at the residence to discuss recent developments in the Niger Delta. During the 90-minute discussion, the aging Ijaw leader and former Minister of Information under former military leader General Gowon was forthright, warm, and openly appreciative of USG support for Nigeria, especially in regards to finding a solution to the crisis in the Niger Delta. He was optimistic about prospects for peace and believed in the sincerity of President Yar'Adua's efforts to calm the region. He claimed to be actively involved in efforts to arrange the September 21 ceasefire (reftels) in Rivers State after a surge in violence, saying that he is a frequent interlocutor with the largest and most active of the militant groups, and said that the establishment of the Ministry for the Niger Delta was a long-term goal finally realized. He was also extremely critical of Chevron's role in the development of local communities in its production areas, saying that its actual performance in the provision of functioning schools, health centers, and boreholes was very poor. He requested the Ambassador's help in prodding Chevron to be a better corporate citizen. The Ambassador supported Chevron's overall good will in these areas, but said she would ask them about more details on what could be done. While observers frequently question Clark's connectedness to key Niger Delta players and his overall relevance to the situation, if what he said about his intermediary efforts and his interaction with the militants are true, he remains influential and still may have a role to play in bringing peace to the Niger Delta.

He also said he had forwarded a list of militant names to President Yar'Adua to be considered for amnesty. End summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador and Bayelsa leader Chief E.K. Clark held their first meeting September 25 at the residence. Clark stated his belief that President Yar'Adua is sincere in wanting to finally resolve the Niger Delta crisis. Over the past eight days, he claims to have met with Secretary to the Government of the Federation Mahmud Yayale Ahmed and the acting Minister of Defense, and discussed with them the

possibility of an amnesty for true "freedom fighters," vice criminals. They were receptive to the idea, he says, and he passed them a list of names he believes would be suitable candidates for any such amnesty. Only some of the "boys" are criminals, and that includes some soldiers and police; after amnesty is declared, and the JTF withdraws from the region, militant gangs will lay down their arms, he claimed. "This war will never finish if the Government uses force -- dialogue is the only answer." He believes the GON should be given a chance -- while the Ibrahim Gambari-led Niger Delta Summit was a bad idea rightly rejected by all stakeholders, the formation of the Niger Delta Technical Committee was a positive development that should be encouraged. He also says that the aggressive posture of Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi is extremely unhelpful toward producing lasting peace; Ateke Tom is outraged that Amaechi, a university classmate three years his junior, "calls us criminals." Ateke Tom, Boyloaf, and Tom Polo ("a fine gentleman -- you should visit him") all want peace, and are beginning to police their own areas to restrain the criminals among them. In Bilabri, Rivers State, he claims militants have acted against a kidnapping gang sponsored by a local chief, impounding their boats. Clark says he will appeal to Amaechi to change his tactics.

¶3. (C) Ambassador asked Clark about the level of illegal bunkering as she had heard from some contacts that with the JTF attacks, things had slightly improved. Clark directly challenged the GON's claims that illegal bunkering had recently been reduced by Joint Task Force (JTF) activities, and reiterated his claim (reported in recent press accounts)

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that while his "boys" do "jerrycan (i.e. small scale) bunkering," both retired and active military officers carry out oil theft on a near-industrial scale. He went on to describe his role in MEND's September 21 declaration of a unilateral ceasefire (reftel A), saying that subsequent to their desperate calls to him for help during the JTF's September 13 raids on their camps in the Elem Tombia area of Rivers State, he told them he would go to Abuja to ask for a truce valid through December, and their immediate ceasefire would be necessary for his efforts' success. He also says that last week he received eight representatives from Ateke Tom, Farah Dagogo, Boyloaf, and Tom Polo in his Abuja hotel suite, and convinced them to give the Technical Committee a chance. "Some of these boys are educated, including having masters degrees," he added. Ambassador then asked about Henry Okah. Clark stated that the release of Henry Okah continues to be a top militant demand, and that he is strongly urging the GON to conduct an open trial, bringing to light the theft and subsequent sale to militants of arms from the Kaduna armory. He noted that Okah's wife had told him they were moving Okah to Jos for medical care. He finished his comments on the subject by warning that, especially in light of his reputed kidney ailments, should Okah die in GON custody, there would be a strong reaction from the swamps.

¶4. (C) When asked by Ambassador who he thought was the best candidate to fill the top positions in the newly created Niger Delta Ministry, Clark said that having long fought for its creation, he would not suggest possible names. He thought that of the two Minister positions (one to handle development, one to handle youth empowerment), the development slot should go to a Niger Delta indigene, and the other Minister could be from anywhere else. He hoped the Niger Delta Technical Committee would offer its recommendations on how the Ministry should operate, but in his opinion, as the Federal Capital Territory Ministry receives 1% of the Federal Account, the Delta Ministry should receive at least 5% of the Federal account.

¶5. (C) When asked by the Ambassador to elaborate on his claims that Chevron in particular was not living up to its commitments to local communities, Clark encouraged her to request a list of all of Chevron's projects, and then ask to

know the actual current status of each project. Most, he assured her, would be failures, such as Ugborodo, an erosion-threatened town Chevron rebuilt to great fanfare that is now uninhabitable, or Tsekelewe, which has no water supply and yet is in the shadow of one of Chevron's platforms. Chevron digs boreholes without clean water, builds schools without desks, and erects health centers on such low ground that they are regularly flooded during the rains. Ambassador noted in support of Chevron that they have goodwill in making these efforts such as their vocational training centers, etc.

Clark said that vocational training centers, such as Chevron's in Escravos, offer skills, but without liaison officers to follow up, such skills remained unhelpful to a community's overall development. The Ambassador promised to take up the matter with Chevron, but pressed Clark to recognize that mere liaison officers were not enough -- more coordination and support were needed to turn skills into actual jobs, and there was a difference between vocational training and actual income generation. Drawing on her experience in Brazzaville, the Ambassador emphasized the importance of the availability of capital and credit through microfinance schemes so successful in other part of Africa.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Clark claims still to be a major player to whom the likes of Ateke Tom and Boyloaf turn in time of need, but others have pointed out that while he may still have access, he has little to no influence on making them change their behavior. Clark says otherwise -- as one of the region's only reliable go-betweens, the GON seems to view him as more relevant than ever. He is optimistic and credits Aso Rock with sincerity, good will, and peaceful intentions toward Niger Deltans, but it seems that the JTF isn't getting the word -- a September 24 Financial Times interview says JTF Commander in Rivers State BG Bello vows to "break the

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rebels." Other contacts, including Bayelsa Governor Silva during a recent interagency trip to the state on September 27, see stepped up military action as the way to stem the violence once amnesty is given to an agreed upon list of the militants. END COMMENT.

SANDERS